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She Was Not a Cousin A Mentor or a Sister, Only a Phantom Who Taught Me How to Bury My Life in the Ground and Run

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Abstract

When I was six an older girl
came to live with us.
I never learned for sure if she was human
or a ghost.
She could have been an exchange student.

Keywords

Poem, poetry, long titles, people



September 14, 2012

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Caitlin Vance

When I was six an older girl
came to live with us.
I never learned for sure if she was human
or a ghost.
She could have been an exchange student.

She had long skirts made of paper
and hair that held the wind
and made low moans of harpsichords.
Crow feathers hung from her ears.
What she'd do: she'd glide

alone in glass shoes through crowds
in our city. She said streets
filled with strangers freed her.
Instead of swallowing herself, pushing in and under
like eyeballs in meditation,

she could just exist.

She'd walk to a nearby hill and smoke.

Instead of sneaking out
between her teeth the smoke hid
inside the toy trunk of her chest.
She thought we wouldn't know,
but I could see through her skin.
The crow feathers tinged

at the ends, like scraps of paper
floating and slowly burning
in the wind.
Once I followed her to the top
of the hill and hid under the bench.

She had miniature doors in her pocket
that day and she lined them up in the dirt,
one after the other.
She took out a tiny doll and stuck him in the front.

All the doors were open
with ants crawling through them,
except the last, which was stuck.
The tiny doll threw his arms at the sky
and howled,
like a seagull flying out over the ocean
to greet death.
The girl did the same.
The doll and doors vanished
with a flash of light, and so did she.

She left those crow feathers behind,
which sit in my palms,
sparking even now.

Caitlin Vance is a writer living in Brooklyn, where she has worked at various schools, coffee shops, and nonprofits. She received her BA in Philosophy from Colby College in 2011. Her poems and stories have been published or are forthcoming in *Tin House* and in the now-defunct *FortyOunceBachelors*. She hopes to continue writing and growing.